



Eagle in the Snow: A Novel of General Maximus and Rome's Last Stand

Wallace Breem , Steven Pressfield (Introduction)

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Banished to the Empire's farthest outpost, veteran warrior Paulinus Maximus defends The Wall of Britannia from the constant onslaught of belligerent barbarian tribes. Bravery, loyalty, experience, and success lead to Maximus's™ appointment as "General of the West" by the Roman emperor, the ambition of a lifetime. But with the title comes a caveat: Maximus needs to muster and command a single legion to defend the perilous Rhine frontier.

On the opposite side of the Rhine River, tribal nations are uniting; hundreds of thousands mass in preparation for the conquest of Gaul, and from there, a sweep down into Rome itself. Only a wide river and a wily general keep them in check.

With discipline, deception, persuasion, and surprise, Maximus holds the line against an increasingly desperate and innumerable foe. Friends, allies, and even enemies urge Maximus to proclaim himself emperor. He refuses, bound by an oath of duty, honor, and sacrifice to Rome, a city he has never seen. But then circumstance intervenes. Now, Maximus will accept the purple robe of emperor, if his scrappy legion can deliver this last crucial victory against insurmountable odds. The very fate of Rome hangs in the balance.

Combining the brilliantly realized battle action of *Gates of Fire* and the masterful characterization of Mary Renault's™ *The Last of the Wine*, *Eagle in the Snow* is nothing less than the novel of the fall of the Roman empire.

Eagle in the Snow: A Novel of General Maximus and Rome's Last Stand Details

Date : Published February 1st 2004 by Rugged Land Books (first published 1970)

ISBN : 9781590710203

Author : Wallace Breem , Steven Pressfield (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Roman

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From Reader Review Eagle in the Snow: A Novel of General Maximus and Rome's Last Stand for online ebook

J.A. Kahn says

This is a very gripping story, a bit slow to start but soon becomes one of those books you can't put down. It is very moving in parts and is perfect for those grey winter days.

Xabi1990 says

4,25/5 o lo que es lo mismo, que está MUY bien pero con alguna reserva.

Se desarrolla durante los últimos años del imperio romano de Occidente, cuando las tribus bárbaras invadieron la Galia atravesando la frontera del Rin. El protagonista es Máximo, el general romano a cargo de la defensa de esa frontera.

Por lo que he trasteado por la red creo que es un personaje más o menos real pero con muchas licencias del escrito (vamos, que no es tan real como los que suele traernos Posteguillo).

Ya sabéis cómo acaba la cosa, ¿no? Entonces nos queda disfrutar de la ambientación, de la forma de narrar y de los personajes.

La ambientación soberbia. Lo grueso de la trama se desarrolla en diciembre, con nieve y frío para aburrir (el título del libro ya lo dice) y realmente nos mete el libro en faena. La angustia de la defensa en inferioridad de condiciones, el sufrimiento, el orgullo, el valor o la cobardía, las lealtades y las traiciones, las penalidades y los sentimientos de los personajes, de la legión XX en su conjunto ...eso es lo que más vale, ahí se lleva las cinco estrellas y eso es lo que hace a este libro algo digno de ser leído.

Es fácil escribir sobre héroes o victorias o finales felices. Es mas jodido lo contrario, lo que vemos aquí.

Personajes : creo que alguien los ensalza en sus críticas pero a mí sólo me han parecido reales dos : Máximo y Quito. Algo el obispo y el curador, pero poco más (creo que esta opinión es minoritaria, pero ahí queda) Además, hay muchos, muchos, muchos, y te pierdes en ocasiones.

Agilidad narrativa : ...pse!... bien pero no para tirar cohetes. Te mete en la ambientación y el ritmo es bueno pero no llega al engancho que nos mete el autor español ese que he dicho antes.

RESUMEN : que sí, que merece la pena pero no borda el 5. He dudado mucho en dejarle con las cuatro estrellas pero al final el regusto ha prevalecido sobre los aspectos individuales.

Tasha says

This one started off slow for me and didn't really grab my full attention until really towards the end. Throughout the book, I felt disconnected with the characters and felt they were not developed well. They felt

flat and unemotional. I found myself struggling to remember names, places and events. At times, I felt like this might end up being a 2.5 star read and at others a solid 3 stars. The end really picked up during the last battle scene and it was here, finally, that I felt I could really feel emotionally connected to the characters and drawn in to the battle scene. Looking back, I think as a writer, Breem improved as the story moved along so what felt choppy and cold initially, felt more smooth and connected later on. Overall, a generally good read.

Kathy says

This moving book giving us a front-row seat to events from 407-409 during the struggles of trying to hold walls and land whilst Germans mount their brutal offense is brilliant on all "fronts."

I purchased the kindle edition and will definitely read again.

General Maximus, never having seen Rome in his lifetime, was Rome personified in his years of determined service. He is continually called upon to work miracles with new recruits.

"By the end of three months the legion had doubled its original size and the men were getting fit. At the end of a twenty mile march in the pouring rain, their clothes sodden and their feet sore, they could erect a camp complete with defenses in the space of forty minutes and then fight a sixty minute action afterwards."

Maximus told them "It is no good learning to march fifteen miles if you are so out of breath at the end of it that you cannot kill a man first try when he is stabbing at you. He will kill you first instead, and your long walk will have been a waste of time."

Kristen Smith says

It was truly OK. I admire the research that Breem put into this novel. His personal experiences obviously influenced it in a good way. I wanted this novel to be as good as the intro and blurbs said it was.

This novel only needed a few tweaks to make it the brilliant and moving novel that the introduction and jacket quotes say it is. Unfortunately, the tweaks were not done.

The relationships and nuances were too subtle so as to be lost in the confusing passages of time and additions of new characters on every page. For example, there was a bit about a golden earring that was supposed to be weighty, but I had forgotten all about it because 30 or 40 years had passed by in about the length of one chapter. Add in all the new characters met and known within 30 years and yep! My mind had lost the thread. I appreciate subtlety, but since I do not familiar with the customs of 20 non-Roman tribes and Roman armies around 400 AD, a mere allusion to a "bloodied hand" is not enough to tell me that the cutting off of thumbs rendered one ineligible for Roman army service, especially if said thumb-cutters are seen riding horses around the country-side! This allusion was also ten pages and five new characters removed from the actual conversation dealing with the result of thumb-cutting, a result that made the main character want to throw-up for shame, anger, frustration, etc. This scene was frustrating for me and the pattern is repeated throughout the novel.

I wish Breem would revisit this novel and rework it. It needs about 200 more pages of relationship details. If done, this novel could be one of the finest war novels since "War and Peace."

As it stands, if you're into books that require consulting a dictionary and map at every page, researching tribal and Roman practices in-depth in preparation to understand all the allusions, and making a friend/relationship tree as you read, this is the book for you.

Since this was Breem's first novel, I will probably check out his other novels. I hope they are as good as this one could have been.

Edoardo Albert says

Among writers of historical fiction, *Eagle in the Snow* has achieved semi-legendary status. It was first published in 1970 and, largely through recommendation, has remained in print ever since (no small feat in itself when the author, Wallace Breem, died in 1990).

It's the subtlety and mood of the book that gives it its power and creates its status. It's the story of the dying of things: empires, men, armies, a civilisation. It's the story of a man born out of time, fighting against the dying of the light. It's a story of the end of Rome suffused with the nostalgia for fallen things that is a legacy of the northern tribes that defeated the Empire and replaced it on this island. That's the unspoken, because never acknowledged, paradox at the heart of this book. While there were elements of nostalgia for a lost golden age in Roman civilisation, the twilight mood of *Eagle in the Snow* is a product of a people and a writer whose civilisation rests upon three supports: the Classical tradition of Rome and Greece, the Judeo-Christian and the foreshadowing of ultimate loss that results from the Ragnarok of the Anglo-Saxons. So this is a book of the defeat of a civilisation that is made into the work of art that it is by the worldview of the civilisations that defeated and supplanted it.

Jason Golomb says

"*Eagle In The Snow*" by Wallace Breem centers on the years 405 AD to early 407, capturing a key moment in the Roman Empire's death throes as hundreds of thousands of mostly Germanic peoples mass on the east bank of the Rhine waiting for the river to freeze and to walk into Gaul. The tale is an epitaph for the Roman Empire with General Paulinus Gaius Maximus serving as the lone pall bearer, carrying the weight of an empire marching inexorably toward its grave.

Compared to the action adventures of *Scarrow*, *Igguldon* or *Duffy*, the writing style of "*Eagle in the Snow*" is stark, abrupt and subtle. "*Eagle*" is deep and the prose and exposition are very genuine. Think of *Scarrow* and *Duffy* as TV movies, and Breem as an Oscar-worthy film. It's no surprise that the book was a Bestseller, and in the realm of Roman historical fiction, "*Eagle*" justifies its praise as a classic. For those less interested in Roman military fiction, like the Rhine itself, "*Eagle*" runs much deeper.

Breem paints a very detailed and accurate picture of life in Maximus' world. This historical novel is as solid in its history as documentation and archaeology allowed in the late '60s, and the liberties taken seem to be few and forgivable. He draws a very vivid exposition of existence at the ends of the Roman earth. He elicits emotion through the subtle interplay between characters and through Maximus' monologue.

The story is structured from Maximus' point of view, who narrates all but the prologue and epilogue. He is the consummate Roman - born in Gaul to Roman ancestry, raised to be a soldier. He loves Rome with every thread of his being, and despite never having been there, he loves what the city is and what it represents. Breem's Maximus is the Roman ideal.

His cousin Julian was brought up by his own parents as Julian's were forced to commit suicide by a usurping Roman Emperor. Julian also grows up to be a soldier, but at this point the cousins' paths diverge. Maximus and Julian represent two sides of a Roman coin - on one side is Maximus: the Empire, staunch, disciplined,

loyal and forever Roman. On the other side is Julian: the Empire in decline, resentful, living-on-the-fringe, and consumed by hatred.

Maximus is pushed to break away from the Empire and lead his frontier legions as a new emperor. He declines both times, once to his Roman legion and once to the Germanic tribes. Julian intercedes on the tribes' behalf and Maximus explains why he can't accept: "My Empire has had more usurping Emperors than I can count...all weakened the empire they thought to strengthen. I shall not add to their number." Julian responds: "The Empire is dying, Maximus. It is weaker than when you were a boy..."

Maximus ultimately receives no support from any other Roman legion, reflecting the fractured, disaggregated and self-interested nature of the Empire's far-flung nations. The ending is inevitable - though such is the emotive monologue by Maximus that one can't help but feel hope and optimism at each turn in the ultimate series of battles.

The Rugged Land edition of the book (published in 2004) provides a detailed list of characters, historical timeline, Roman and modern place names, and glossaries of tribes and 5th century terms. It's particularly helpful that historical figures are distinguished from those that are purely fictional. Maximus, while perhaps loosely based on Generals of the time, is fictional. A more detailed map also would've been helpful.

Mark says

I am by no means a regular reader of historical fiction, but whatever genre you want to file *EAGLE IN THE SNOW* under, it's an absolute masterpiece: a gripping and terrifying story told in prose that is literary and beautiful but never flowery. As the Roman Empire is crumbling in the early Fifth Century, a Legion is sent to try to hold the Rhine during a bitter winter, and keep the massing barbarian tribes from crossing. The tribes are waiting for the Rhine to freeze over. As Stephen Pressfield's Introduction points out, this book doesn't read like a historical novel, it reads like an account written at the time: the details and sense of place are fantastic but never take the reader out of the story, and the interior monologues are shot through with the beauty and stoicism of Marcus Aurelius's *MEDITATIONS*. Count me now among the raving fans of this book. Incredible.

A taste of the prose style:

The sun shone strongly upon the red and grey of the buildings, and the entrance to the temple was shadowed in darkness. No-one came here now and I had the whole square to myself. The sky was very blue, I remember, and the trees stood silent, their once dark leaves already turned a rich brown. Once it had seemed as though they would live for ever; now they were dying after so short a life, and would soon crumble into dust. A lizard ran across the paving and concealed itself in the tufts of grass that thrust themselves upwards between the cracks, its small body heaving, as though it found the heat too much at that time of the year. I unpinned my cloak and shut my eyes, and felt the sun upon my face. I thought, for a moment or two, of the bustle in the offices of the Basilica, and of the legion in its earth and timber forts, and of all the work that awaited me when I returned. Suddenly, I felt very old and very tired. I thought of the villa at Arelate and of the pool in which I had swum as a boy. I thought of the plans we had made, my wife and I. There had been that winter when it was very cold and we had spent the evenings planning a new and proper home in the forest of Anderida. She had sat by the fire, spinning, while I drew the outlines of the new house with a stick of charcoal upon the back of a duty list. We had argued about the size of the rooms and how many we should need. Quintus had joined us, one night, and we had laughed and joked over the wine. That was the night she

had washed her hair, and she sat by the fire, drying it and listening to our talk. There had to be a special room for him, I insisted, so that he would come to visit us often; and Quintus had agreed, and they had looked at each other and smiled.

I opened my eyes and stared up at the sky. There were so many questions that I had wanted to ask; so many that I had never dared to ask. I never would ask them now. I shut them from my mind. They were the bad things, about which I could do nothing. It was better, I thought, to remember the happy times instead. Perhaps, when all this was over, we would buy a villa still, and farm it, and Quintus would breed horses, and I would write that military history that had been in my mind all these years. And in the evenings we would sit before the fire and drink wine and remind ourselves of the old days. So I sat there, blinking in the sun, and I was just an old man, dreaming foolish dreams.

Curtiss says

This is the story of the Roman leader Paulinus Maximus, who first serves on the frontier in Britain along Hadrian's wall, where he suppresses a bloody revolt by the Picts led by a former childhood friend. While contending with the Picts he hears word of the loss of two legions along the Danube, with the chilling realization that the Empire and even civilization itself may not last forever.

He is then posted on the Rhine to defend against the Germanic tribes with only a single legion. He deftly parries their opening moves, with a combination of tactics, naval/river power, and cunning. But with no help from any of the other garrisons within Gaul, the end is only a matter of time. When the river freezes over on the last day of the year 400 A.D., the tribes are free to cross and enter Gaul.

One horrendous, bloody battle succeeds another, and Paulinus's forces are ground away. As the Vandals and Teutons break through into Gaul, Paulinus makes his way toward Rome alone and is a witness as his premonition about the Empire's fall is realized.

Simon Cook says

This book gets excellent reviews from other readers. I can see why. The writing is basically sound and - more importantly - the gritty detail of army life and intense appreciation of logistics are certainly impressive. But I confess that I have not finished and doubt by now that I will return to it. The story begins with the Romans in Britain but the main action - where I left things - is with the Roman defense of the Rhine against an inevitable barbarian invasion. The inevitability is the problem in that (and of course, not having reached the end, I could be quite wrong) the book as a whole seems to be a prolonged account of hopeless days leading up to the defeat and death of the hero, and after a while the sense of suspense sort of goes.

On my favorite topic of anachronism: I wish I had a little time to research the biography of Wallace Breem, the author. He seems to be a late representative of an imperial Britain and of an English officer class educated to govern the empire. So while Breem's knowledge of Roman history is deep and wide (as one would expect from the Classical education of his generation) there is an interesting implicit - and ultimately suspicious - one-to-one correlation between the perspective of a early 20th century British officer of the old school and his Roman counterpart. Breem's vision combines a sense of the army maintaining the old standards of virtue and service with a civil society rank with corrupt and short-sighted politicians and (worst

of all) bureaucrats who follow orders but lack imagination and initiative and so are unable to deal with actual crisis. In other words, Breem seems to project his disgust with the new post-War Britain onto the last days of the Roman Empire.

Bryn Hammond says

He has a great plot to work with but what isn't history is contrived. Thinly written, even the battles can be flatly written - or sentimental.

I can see why this might have been a milestone, why people who came early might be attached to it. Perhaps it's aged poorly; it seemed a tissue of cliches to me.

E.M. Epps says

While I was reading this, by happenstance my uncle (a naval man) began a blog post with a quote: "Amateurs talk tactics; professionals talk logistics." And that sums up the consummately professional *Eagle in the Snow* in a nutshell: it is a book about logistics. If you are looking for Hollywood-style speechifying, swordfights and fanfare, look elsewhere. If you want to experience alongside the main character what it's like to be a Roman general just before the fall of the Empire, trying to raise an army and get them equipped before the German tribes overrun your frontier - which we, as readers, know they eventually will - then this is the book for you. Not for everybody, but if you like realistic military history, delay not: get a copy. I knew what was going to happen at the end, and I still cried. Tragic and perfect. This will be on my best-of-the-year list.

Two days later I rode southwest in the spring sunshine. Behind me I left my youth, my middle age, my wife, and my happiness. I was a general now and I had only defeat or victory to look forward to. There was no middle way any longer, and I did not care.

Review from my blog, **[This Space Intentionally Left Blank](#)**

Adam Lofthouse says

I love this book, one of the few I have read more than once. The characters are real and brought to life in a beautifully layered Roman world.

The mark of a great author is when they can get you shivering in the cold, sweating in the heat of battle, Wallace Breem does this with ease.

An absolute must for anyone with even a vague interest in the Roman world

Carlos says

This is a very sad book, but in the end an uplifting one if You know what I mean for this.

The story of a detachment of people, their leader and how they had to follow orders until the very end. Now We know exactly what book Steven Pressfield was reading when He wrote Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae.

A great empire about to fall is the perfect background to tell the story of honor, bravery and the sense of duty that It is lacking today in our lives.

Loving this book and I know You'll too.

Jane says

A splendid novel: an absolute masterpiece!!! I loved the author's style and descriptions of the bleak landscape, forts, and towns; I could feel every sword thrust, the ice and snow, every emotion of the protagonist! The mood of foreboding permeated the whole novel. Set in the 4th and 5th centuries, the time of Honorius, Stilicho, and Galla Placidia, the story is told in the first person in flashback by the dour Roman General Maximus, to a group of tribesmen in Segontium (modern-day Caernarfon, Wales). The general holds to the stoic manly virtues of the earlier Rome. Due to a quirk of fate, the Rhine freezes over and the barbarians cross on the ice to the west bank, overwhelming the Romans at the 30th milestone between Augusta Treverorum (Trier) and Moguntiacum (Mainz).

In history, this Rhine battle actually did contribute to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire not many years hence. The ending, in an epilogue, was heart-breaking. The author has clearly done his historical research. Possibly for heightened dramatic effect, the author blended the forced suicide of Martinus, Vicarius of Britannia, with those of Arria and Paetus, all three of them historical figures.

Alex Harrison says

Absolutely tremendous novel that deals with the waning of the Roman empire and is a terrific, exciting read. Imagine the first half hour of "Gladiator" but better. The general here is also a Maximus, but not the same; this Maximus has to stand against the enormous hordes that are about to sweep over the Northern borders of the Roman empire, and who will basically end the empire in the West.

A magnificent book.

Dawn says

I loved it all, the writing, the story and the characters. I thought the battle scenes were very well done and the setting at the end of the empire was new for me so I found it very interesting.

Ozymandias says

Story: 3 (Melodramatic to the extreme)

Characters: 2 (Basic archetypes with poor dialogue)

Accuracy: 1 (Outdated and polemic)

I can't understand this book's popularity. I enjoy reading about the later empire so I was thrilled to see a novel set in that time. But boy does it not get the feel of it. First off, the entire writing style is ponderous and overdramatic, like a soap opera combined with a Victorian novel. It constantly reminds you that THIS IS AN IMPORTANT BOOK in such loud cries that it seemed vaguely insecure. Secondly, all of the characters are wooden cutouts. The lead might as well be called Semper Fidelis Militaris because he is exactly like every other noble warrior in literary history: proud and loyal to a fault. Other characters don't even benefit from that depth. Thirdly, despite being fairly unique in covering the military fall of the Roman Empire the book is filled with cliches, many of them outdated even at the time of writing. Corrupt emperors, eternally correct soldiers who nobody listens to, barbarian hordes... They even rely on the old racist Western cliché of the civilized man going over to the barbarians where he is immediately appointed their leader due to his superior nature. Ugh. And speaking of outdated, the fourth big issue is that it's woefully inaccurate both in fact and tone. There was never a Roman Empire like this, and if its fall could be solved by the simple expedient of listening to one practical soldier then it would have been. The late Empire is full of perfectly competent soldiers who became emperors or warlords. That was part of the problem. And the grating wistfulness that seems to capture people's imagination is never actually justified by the events of the novel. All in all a major disappointment.

Marilyn says

I just finished reading Eagle in the Snow. It held me spellbound from cover to cover. The portrayal of the actions and the characters was so strong to me that I still feel, painfully, a sense of loss. This is not one book you can jump from carelessly to another waiting on your shelf. It needs to be savored.

Panagiotis says

First of all- Steven Presfield's prologue should be read carefully and be taken as an oath for anyone who tries to create a historical-fiction book. In one single page he describes the process in an elaborate way.

About the book- Maximus is a man of honour and duty. A strong character lawfully to his orders, a man who decides to stay and fight till the end, knowing that this will be his last battle. Like the Spartan Leonidas he fights till the bitter end, but not to delay his enemies and awaken those who will face the threat after his sacrifice. He knows that the Empire will fall. Yes sometime he hopes for a miracle, he anticipates for a help. But deep inside he knows from the start the way that this will end. He fights only to defend what he always believed and admired, he fights and then falls together with his Empire. Because Maximus is his Empire. Maximus represents all the values and virtues that held strong this Empire for centuries and his almost poetic struggle and final defeat, a procedure that lasts just more than a year, reflects the fall of Roman Empire that lasted about one century. A struggle against all the things that represent the reasons for Rome's defeat.

Decline, unwillingness to face the truth, arrogance, religion conflicts, introversion, betrayal and a countless enemy who could not be stopped in an environment like that.

I would like to see some more of Maximus youth and friendship with Julian in the story. However that is not a drawback since you get to know Maximus more than enough during the book, and so the rest of the characters.

Amazing battle descriptions, strong action, fully emotional story. Great!
